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Address by U.S. Ambassador William McCormick

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BUILDING MOMENTUM: TOWARDS A STRONGER U.S. – N.Z. RELATIONSHIP

I would like to thank the Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs for inviting me to address it this evening.

Over recent months, the already strong relationship between the United States and New Zealand has stepped up a gear to become even stronger. The most recent visible sign of this was Prime Minister Clark's highly successful visit to Washington, where she met with President Bush, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

In Washington, U.S. officials sought the Prime Minister's views on the agreed agenda and other pressing problems of the day. Strong appreciation was expressed for New Zealand's contributions in Afghanistan and the Pacific Islands. Officials also acknowledged New Zealand's important work on economic and non-proliferation issues.

Both sides also agreed to continue to cooperate on World Trade negotiations, as a successful Doha Development Round would help not just New Zealand and the United States, but the entire world.

A successful Doha Round would provide opportunities for developed nations to help developing nations to foster prosperity, not dependency. It would allow an estimated 76 million people to be lifted out of the grim cycle of poverty.

It is especially interesting to me that this very successful and very friendly visit did not avoid discussing issues where we disagree. On these issues, we acknowledged our differences and recognized the importance both countries attach to our respective positions. We chose to focus on issues where we agree we can cooperate and can make a difference.

The Prime Minister's visit clearly shows that the relationship between the United States and New Zealand is now the strongest it has been in decades. And I see things getting even better.

Bilateral cooperation and engagement have become more frequent now than at any time in the last two decades. These are clearly good times for relations between our two countries. The Prime Minister's Washington visit created many positive media reports.

When things are going so well, it is natural to look for the areas where we can improve the relationship even further. But it is a shame when eagerness for further improvement crowds-out the progress that has already been made.

It's similar to what happens after an All Blacks win. Even when they triumph, there's always someone who believes that they did not score enough tries or that the margin of victory was not wide enough.

In that regard, I confess to being a little surprised that some New Zealanders did not see the visit for the tremendous success it was. Some chose to focus on the fact that the visit did not achieve an immediate start to bilateral Free Trade Agreement talks. Others noted that none of the remaining constraints on our military cooperation disappeared as a result of the visit. Still others dwelt on our disagreements over the Iraq War.

I share your appetite for progress in the relationship and I welcome the growing level of interest and focus on our bilateral ties that have occurred since I first arrived in Wellington. My point is that focusing on what has not

been accomplished should not obscure the great things we are doing. And they really are great things, for both our countries and for the world.

Before I give you a few examples of what we are doing together, allow me to address the perception held by some that there is an imbalance in the relationship.

The U.S. - New Zealand relationship is an equal partnership. Granted, the partners are not of equal size. But they equally value each other's contributions. It is first and foremost, as the Prime Minister has noted, a partnership built on shared values and common goals. I believe that we are both committed to a common vision of the future.

The United States and New Zealand have different resources available to them. When we work together we use our respective strengths to advance common goals. A case in point is North Korea. The United States is one of the six parties directly discussing the problem of North Korea's nuclear program. New Zealand, as a leader on non-proliferation issues and a recognized multilateral player, has greatly added significant value to the process.

Foreign Minister Peters has participated in the 5 plus 5 talks that have demonstrated to the North Koreans that many countries want to see a nuclear free Korean Peninsula. The North Korean leadership, along with the international community, has heard senior New Zealand Government officials repeatedly condemn their nuclear test.

Our solidarity on North Korea underlines that there is a meeting of minds between Washington and Wellington about the threat to international security posed by the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Our shared concerns over Iran's path to nuclearization further demonstrate our common ground on nuclear counter-proliferation around the world. We can all agree that if weapons of mass destruction fall into the wrong hands then no one is safe.

The United States and New Zealand, together with other like-minded countries, are cooperating to address this potential threat through our joint work under the Proliferation Security Initiative, or PSI.

This initiative builds on efforts by the international community to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. It is a very important multi-country program that benefits us all. The United States relies on New Zealand's commitment to it. Together we participate in a range of PSI meetings and exercises.

This cooperation was evident when Defence Minister Goff -- for the first time -- hosted the United States and 19 other countries at an important PSI-related meeting in Auckland in March. The meeting allowed for a review of recent PSI developments, together with discussion about future exercises and the short-term strategic direction of the program.

The United States also counts on New Zealand's outstanding efforts to explain the importance of the initiative to Pacific Island Countries and others in the Asia Pacific region.

Nowhere do we rely more on New Zealand leadership than in the Pacific Islands.

To be perfectly frank, in recent years the United States has not dedicated enough diplomatic attention or development assistance to the Pacific Island Countries.

Although we are involved in Micronesia we have not been as heavily involved in Polynesia.

We recognize that this must change and we are accelerating our efforts to do that. We realize we need to work harder to encourage prosperity, good governance, and the rule of law in the region.

Toward that end, the U.S. State Department has declared 2007 “The Year of the Pacific” so that other U.S. agencies will work collectively to focus more on the region. In this effort, the State Department is the lead agency. Others involved include:

- The Department of Defense
- The Coast Guard
- The Department of the Interior
- The office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and
- The Peace Corps, who incidentally have been sending volunteers to help out in Pacific Island Countries for decades now. Samoa, to which I am accredited, has recently observed 40 years of the Peace Corps work on that island.

New Zealand’s strong cultural ties to the South Pacific provide an anchor in that region that the United States does not have. We are particularly indebted to your diplomats, aid workers, and scholars who provide us with a unique perspective on the South Pacific.

In January, I participated in a meeting in Hawaii of U.S. Ambassadors to South Pacific countries. Deputy Secretary Alan Williams from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, together with his Australian counterpart, were invited to attend.

It was clear to me and to my fellow Ambassadors that Alan and his Australian colleague have a huge store of knowledge and understanding regarding Pacific Island issues. I have found that this quality is typical among New Zealand and Australian diplomats.

Such insights and concrete suggestions were most useful and we continue to draw on such local expertise. In Wellington, my staff and I regularly compare notes on Pacific Island events with experts from both inside and outside of government. These include:

- MFAT
- NZ AID
- The New Zealand Customs Service
- The New Zealand Immigration Service
- The Centre of Strategic Studies, and
- The Pacific Cooperation Foundation.

I cannot tell you the number of times Washington officials have told me how valuable these read-outs have been.

The United States and New Zealand are also working together to promote economic and social justice in the region. We are impressed with the significant proportion of New Zealand overseas development assistance that goes to Pacific Island Countries.

Next week, the United States will host representatives from Pacific Nations at a major conference in Washington. New Zealand will be a part of those meetings and will play a key role in discussions. As President Bush has acknowledged, New Zealand offers regional leadership and expertise and we rely on your know-how to help solve the problems of the Pacific.

The relationship between New Zealand and the United States is marked by broad and deep contacts despite our geographic distance.

An example of this is the level of cooperation between U.S. and New Zealand scientists. This is a highly successful and long-standing aspect of the bilateral relationship. Yet, it regrettably often goes unnoticed.

The cooperative work of our scientists covers many areas and disciplines. One of the most important of these is climate change. The combined efforts of our climate scientists embody the very depth and purpose of our partnership to address common challenges. Official bilateral climate change

cooperation between our governments began in 2002 with the launch of the U.S. - New Zealand Bilateral Climate Change Partnership.

In 2007, the Partnership encompasses over 35 joint projects covering a broad range of climate topics. Recent projects include:

- A study of global methane emissions
- The recovery and digital collection of historic climate data, and
- Working with developing countries in the Pacific on climate observation.

One place where our scientists work very closely together is Antarctica. Earlier this year I joined Prime Minister Clark, Sir Edmund Hillary and other dignitaries on the frozen continent to commemorate the 50-year anniversary of U.S. – New Zealand Antarctic cooperation.

Antarctica is one place on earth where we are not just good friends, but also good neighbors. Even during the downtimes in U.S. - New Zealand relations, the sense of purpose, friendship and cooperation between New Zealanders and Americans on the ice never wavered. This anniversary celebration made clear to me, and I dare say to Prime Minister Clark, that cooperation is alive and well, and is important to both countries.

The recent establishment of a bilateral framework between the U.S. Geological Survey and NIWA to improve cooperation and sharing of information in the earth sciences further strengthened the scientific relationship.

U.S. and New Zealand scientific relations also go well beyond the government-directed research. Private sector U.S. – New Zealand scientific exchange and cooperation is also well documented and well advanced. Overall, many New Zealand scientists have a connection to the American scientific community.

Relations between the United States and New Zealand are not only deeper, but they are also broader than at any time in decades. On a personal note, I am delighted that the relationship is even closer than when I first arrived here a year and an half ago.

I believe that although things are great, we should always look for ways to further strengthen and inspire the bilateral relationship. I believe that any new heights in our relationship are more easily reached through small steps, rather than big bounds.

A recent example of how working together on even relatively small problems can make a big difference was in the case of the stricken Japanese whaling vessel in the Southern Ocean. The U.S. deployed resources to help the New Zealand Government assess the ship's situation. Diplomats, government scientists, and other officials from both countries worked together to help ensure the accident did not turn into an environmental disaster close to the shores of Antarctica and the world's largest breeding ground of Adelie penguins.

One aspect of my job that I truly relish is the opportunity to travel around New Zealand.

I've heard and seen first-hand the dreams and aspirations of down-to-earth Kiwis. I have also heard that many New Zealanders share my desire to explore further ways to strengthen what is already a strong relationship.

Last Friday, I had the pleasure to address the New Zealand Sister City Conference in Te Anau. Many New Zealand cities and towns have established sister-city relationships in the U.S. Many more will follow, I am sure. Sister-city relationships help facilitate frequent person-to-person contact between Americans and New Zealanders. It is one example of how the already strong relationship between our two countries can become even stronger.

Both governments are working well together at all levels -- bilateral, regional, and multi-lateral -- to address issues and meet challenges that can affect us now and into the future.

We are even working well at a local level. I am thankful for the Honorable Trevor Mallard's efforts in helping my 11 year-old son settle into his local Hutt Valley rugby club.

Although, it could be said that I am perhaps less thankful for all the subsequent mud being dragged through the house after my son's games and practices. But that is a small price to pay for closer bilateral relations. And besides, the U.S. Government owns the rug.

In conclusion, whether it is rugby, global trade, counter-proliferation or scientific cooperation, the U.S. – New Zealand relationship is in very good working order.

We have a good partnership that is more than ever marked by predictability, mutual respect and cooperation.

And I look forward to it becoming ever stronger going forward.

Thank you.